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A Concise View Of The Rise, Progress, Improvement And Present State Of Medicine.

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Introduction.

By the word Physic, was formerly understood, Natural Philosophy. It has since been employed to denote, Medendi Scientia, Ars Medicinalis, or the Science of Medicince. A knowledge of this science, presupposes an intimate acquaintance with the laws of the animal economy, both in health and disease, or of Physiology Pathology, Materia Medica, and Therapeutics.

As constituting a branch of Medicine, Surgery might, very justly, be included.

Chirurgia, is derived from the Greek χειρ, the hand, and εργον, work. To a superficial mind, it would appear from this etymology, that surgery is only a mechanical art. But his ideas must be very contracted, and illiberal, who considers it as consisting in manual dexterity alone. By what mechanical operation, or manual skill, does the surgeon cure fever, erysipelas, or the venereal disease? He is not a surgeon who has merely acquired

* as in some recent dialyses, or ectopia, where it is only necessary to replace the parts, and retain them in situ, to insure a speedy union, or restitution: no fever &c. attending

† I am not here asserting that the business of the surgeon is exclusively the treatment of diseases. It certainly is not, for he is most frequently employed in the management of accidental injuries. But the treatment of some diseases particularly appertains to the surgeon, and all those which supervene accidental injuries.

the art of dressing a wound, applying a bandage, tying up an artery, or extirpating a tumour; but he who knows the structure, action, and functions, of the human body, the several changes it may undergo, and the several powers by which it can be changed; qualifications equally necessary, both for the surgeon and the physician.

If these remarks be just, physic and surgery, though sometimes disunited, yet their theory, and general principles, are so indivisible, that they, in fact, really constitute one and the same science. What the physician cannot cure, he applies to the surgeon to remove. The former cures whatever diseases his remedies and skill enable him to cure, and palliates the rest. The latter cures whatever diseases will admit of a remedy, removes whatever diseased parts cannot be cured; and will admit of removing; and palliates those diseases, which can neither be cured nor removed. Both the physician and the surgeon, accomplish these indications, by those means which change the state of the system, or by those which excite, and keep up an action, incompatible with the

disease, or morbid action, and one that has a tendency to terminate in health.

Having shown the intimate connexion between physic and surgery, I proceed to give some account of their rise, progress, improvement, and present state.

Of the Rise and Progress of Physic.

It is highly rational to suppose, that our science took its origin, at a period not far remote, from that of disease itself. The sight of a fellow being in distress, borne down by the weight of disease, and a desire of lessening human misery, by human means, prompted some one, to search for a remedy, suited to the object in view. But for whatever was known on the subject of physic before the invention of letters, and the cultivation of the arts and sciences generally, we must forever remain ignorant. The most ancient histories with which we are acquainted, as though the events to be related were of more abundant importance to mankind, scarcely hint at the subject of medicine.

It has been questioned whether Moses, the emancipator and law-giver of the Israelites, had ever entered into the sacred arcana of Apollo? But it can scarcely be doubted that he was not familiarly acquainted with whatever was known on the subject of medicine in his time, as he was brought up among the most enlightened of the age, and in-

* Cullen's Mat. Med.

instructed in all the learning of Egypt. But it is remarkable that he mentions no other diseases in the Pentateuch, but leprosy, gonorrhoea, and fluor albus, nor any remedies for these, but those of a prophylactic nature, better calculated to prevent their spreading, than to effect their cure.

"The first distinct account of the art of physic, as exercised by a particular class of men, are those we have of it in Greece, among the priests of Aesculapius. The temples of Aesculapius were, probably, the first schools of the art, the first writings upon it were produced here, and from these originated the first clinical practitioners."*

Of these was Hippocrates, who has, emphatically, and perhaps justly, been styled, The Father of Medicine. It is in his writings that we must look for what was then, and for what had previously, been known, on the subject of physic. Possessed of a mind truly great and good, of a genius splendid and illustrious, and of an education, every way adequate to the purpose,

Hippocrates, more than any man before his time, contributed to the advancement of the medical science, by his quick discernment, and correct observation of diseases, and by his persevering, and indefatigable attention to their phenomena.

Aristotle, and Theophrastus, by laying the foundation of natural history, helped to improve the knowledge of the materia medica.

Herophilus the Anatomist, who held a distinguished rank among the Greek physicians, was none of the least active in his endeavours to discover remedies suited to the cure of such diseases as then prevailed.

Whether Philinus of Cos, the pupil of Herophilus, and Serapion, reputed founders of the Empiric sect, contributed to the improvement of physic, is not known.

In Rome, physic might early have been expected to make rapid advances. But this we find was not the case. For, though this city afterwards became the seat

of physicians, poets, philosophers, orators and statesmen; yet long after its foundation, it was the asylum of criminals and vagabonds, a rude, licentious, and uncivilized race of men, more addicted to arms, than to arts. Their greatest concern was, to people their city, extend their conquests, and heighten their triumphs, by successive victories, fearing to encourage the cultivation of the fine arts, lest it should tend to cool their ardour for war, and quench their thirst for rapine and slaughter. The practise, for a long time, was in the hands of Greek physicians, who established themselves at Rome. Among the number who flourished here, none of the least celebrated, was Asclepiades. But it is said, his theory was so profound, that few of his cotemporaries could understand it; which difficulty is supposed to have given rise to the Methodic sect.

The famous Celsus was, perhaps, the only native Roman who ever became distinguished in medicine. A great deal more occurs in his writings, relating to the materia medica, wherein his judgment and capa-

* The Theriaca Andromachi, containing sixty one articles, is a specimen of this.

-bility, are obvious, than in those of any former author. His errours are hardly to be mentioned, when we take into consideration the difficulties he laboured under. But the study of poisons, and antidotes, now became fashionable, and is said to have engrossed great part of the time of this literary man; as well as that of his cotemporaries and immediate successors.

What now served, in a great measure, to retard the progress, and reproach the practitioners, of medicine, was, that ungenerous selfishness of keeping medicines secret, that injudicious luxuriance of composition from a deficient knowledge of chemistry, and the many superstitious follies which occurred with respect to those remedies.

Diascorides, and Pliny senior, wrote pretty copiously on the materia medica; but the student seldom peruses their works, at this enlightened period, with a view of gaining medical information.

Soon after these, flourished Galen. His ideas of disease, and the operation of medicines, were somewhat peculiar.

* Motherby says, that the day, on which Constantinople was taken by Mahomet the great, may be called the birth-day of learning to the Western party of Europe, from the number of learned Greeks which on that occasion retired to Italy.

He contended that the effects of medicines depend, principally, upon their general qualities of heat and cold, moisture and dryness. However absurd Galen's theory might have been, it was embraced with avidity, and implicitly followed, for nearly fifteen hundred years, by all the physicians of Greece which came after Galen, and by all those of Asia, Europe and Africa. This was probably owing to the subversion of the western part of the Roman empire by the Goths, Vandals, Huns and other Barbarians, and the destruction of the Alexandrian library, and every monument of learning and taste, which put a stop to the cultivation of literature, and every exertion to make any farther improvement in medicine.

It was not till the taking of Constantinople, and the entire overthrow of the Roman empire in 1453, and the study of the language and literature of the Greeks in the west of Europe, that the doctrines of Galen here, became thoroughly known. Though triumphant for a time, they were doomed, at last, to fall under the formidable attacks of the chemists, early in the sixteenth century.

At the head of these, was the eccentric, and enthusiastic, Paracelsus.

During the Alchymical age, some acquisitions to the materia medica took place. "Vehement exertions however employed, are seldom wholly unproductive". For some of our most powerful remedies we are indebted to the discoveries of the alchymists. "When in search of the philosopher's stone, and the immortal elixir, their efforts never ceased, their fires never went out, but all nature groaned beneath their transmutating instruments".

The discovery of the circulation of the blood, we should suppose, would have been attended with considerable reformation and improvement in the practice of medicine. This, however, was not immediately realized. Not aware that the laws which govern passive, and inanimate matter, are entirely different from those which govern living matter, the animal system was looked upon as a mere hydraulic machine, and the preservation of health was supposed to depend entirely on the freedom of the circulation, and on the quantity, and quality, of the fluids:

and disease was imputed to a loss of equilibrium between the solids and fluids, and an interrupted, or disordered circulation.

"In every age", says an elegant writer, "medicine has been corrupted by the ambition to apply to it the general theories, or particular views of the other sciences. Its early history shows, that it was constantly subjected to the dominant philosophy of antiquity. When chemistry triumphed, we have seen its reasonings intermix even with every set of opinions, and shaping every form of practice. Next, mathematics came into vogue, and the functions of the living system, as well as the operations of medicines, were explained on pure geometrical principles. After a while, however, the reign of metaphysics ensuing, we had all its subtleties and abstractions, in the place of the preceding parade of data, postulates, and demonstrations.

"Thus stood our science at the dawn of the eighteenth century, when three distinguished characters arose, to subvert the authority of their predecessors, and to share among them the empire of medicine. These were Stahl,

Boerhaave, and Hoffman? How far their several systems tended to improve the science of medicine, I will not now undertake to determine.

It is here to be observed that in proportion to the establishments of medical schools in Europe, the cultivation of anatomy, physiology and botany, has the practice of physic and surgery been improved, and the materia medica enlarged. To mention the names of the illustrious characters which have been engaged in these important pursuits, would fill volumes. They are respected by every student of medicine, and by every lover of science.

The European writers on the materia medica of a recent date, and those best entitled to our notice, are Murray of Gotingen, Lewis, Cullen, and Dr. Murray of Edenburg.

But how pleasing is the thought, that I have arrived at that period in this detail, when I can mention the flight of medical science to the shores of Columbia, the asylum of the oppressed, the safe retreat from the barbed shafts of tyranny, where the fostering hand of freedom

* Elements of Therap. & Mat. Med.

† Barton's Collections.

guides her sons into every noble pursuit, uncontrolled by the government, the doctrines, and prejudices, of the old world.

Early did the writers on natural history in America, lay the foundation for a materia medica, by their botanic, and sometimes by their medical description, of our numerous plants. "But the credit of leading in this new career, is deservedly due to the late professor Barton of this University. Confessedly it was by him that a real taste for the natural sciences was created, and diffused in the United States, the charms and utility of which, were ardently, and eloquently enforced, in his lectures, in his conversation, and by his writings."* But, how has the ingenuity, the labour, and the perseverence, of the numerous graduates in our different medical schools, been displayed, in investigating the medical properties of American plants! Here is a noble display of talents which cannot be too much admired, nor too much encouraged.

The first treatise on the American materia medica was, a paper entitled Specifica Canadensium. (Vide Amoenitates Academicae Vol. IV. Disertatio 72.)†

* Besides those treatises on the materia medica of the United States, several others have been published: and two very splendid works on that subject, connected with botany, are now publishing; one by the professor of botany in the University of Pennsylvania, and the other by Dr. Bigelow of

The next was that of Dr. J. D. Shoepf of Erlangen, Germany, under the title of Materia Medica Americana Potissimum Regni Vegetabilis. A. 1787.

The learned author of this work, arranges the medicinal articles which he describes, according to the sexual system of Linnaeus: and though he did not always judge of their virtues from his own experience, and was sometimes too credulous of their reputed qualities, yet it answered a valuable purpose by directing the attention of physicians to the examination of our indigenous articles of medicine.

Soon after this appeared the "Collections for an Essay towards a Materia Medica of the United States, by B. S. Barton. M.D. Professor of Materia Medica, Natural History, and Botany, in the University of Pennsylvania". This little work aroused the spirit of investigation and added vigour to the exertions of country practitioners, and medical students throughout the United States. It is surprizing to observe what the learning, the genius, and the well directed endeavours, of one man, can accomplish. "Too early has he been removed from the sphere of

Boston. The work entitled "The Elements of Therapeutics and Materia Medica", recently issued by the professor of the Institute and Practice of Physic, has been received with an avidity, which is the best proof of its merit.

We have long seen the utility of the "American Dispensatory", as giving an accurate account of medicines connected with their pharmaceutical preparation.

These attempts to enlarge and improve the materia medica shall as omineous of a most important and illustrious epoch in the New World which cannot fail to "vindicate the insulted genius of our country from the contumelious reproaches so long, and disgracefully, endured by us."

his labours, and the world deprived of his discoveries and improvements. Emulating, however, his example, those who have succeeded him in the School, in the several departments of the materia medica, natural history, and botany, seem resolute to repair his loss, by pursuing the same radiant path of duty and usefulness".

It is by American physicians, especially the different professors in the University of Pennsylvania, that the most important improvements have been made, in the practice of physic. Persuaded that the diseases of the new world, like its productions, animal and vegetable, its rivers, lakes, and mountains, have forms more gigantic than those of the old, and aware that "American diseases can hardly be cured by strictly following the directions of European books", they laboured to disentangle themselves from the false theories and maxims of their predecessors, and to confine themselves to the phenomena of diseases, and "to the state of the system". Some of the illustrious characters who have contributed largely to the reformation of physic in the United States, are

no more. But their memories shall live in the hearts of all who had the honour of knowing them personally, of hearing their lectures, or of reading their works. Others, engaged in the same cause, survive, to complete their labours, and to receive the honours of their country.)

* Homer's Iliad Book 11.

Of the Rise and Progress of Surgery.

Surgery, as a branch of medical science, can, no doubt, boast of great antiquity. The early existence of war and rapine inevitably exposed the adverse parties to wounds, fractures, contusions, and other injuries. The necessity of a remedy in these cases gave rise to the practice of the healing art which was at first rude and imperfect, but has advanced towards perfection, by slow, and at some periods of time, by almost imperceptible degrees.

History, though perhaps fabulous, informs us, that Apollo communicated his skill in this science to Aesculapius; who, for his proficiency under Chiron the Centaur, was deified, and had temples dedicated to him, in several parts of the world. Machaon and Podalirius, his sons, were both medical, and military men; and in the Trojan war, cured the wounds of their soldiers. Hence, because of their two fold importance, we find, that when Machaon was wounded with the dart of Paris, greater lamentation was made for him than for any other hero.*

In the writings of Hippocrates, are to be found, remarks on the treatment of wounds, ulcers, fractures, luxations &c. He was undoubtedly the ablest surgeon of his time. Other Greeks practiced surgery as Galen, Oribasius of Sardis, Alexander, Trallianus, Aetius, Paulus Aegineta &c.

Among the Romans, Celsus was the most celebrated of his time. Erasistratus, and Herophilus, of the Alexandrian school, are also to be mentioned.

After the burning of the library of Ptolemy Philadelphus, by the Saracens, in 640, consisting of 700,000 volumes, the cultivation of both surgery and physic, may be considered as having an end, in this unhappy country. After the fall of Alexandria, the Arabians, having possessed themselves of some books which probably had been saved from the general conflagration, became more conspicuous in the practice of surgery, than any other nation. Those of this description were, Rhazes, Avicenna, Avenzoar, Averrhoes, and Albucasis.

After these Arabian authors, upon the emerging of learning from the dark clouds of ignorance under which

it had long been veiled, in the thirteenth century, the reformation of surgery was commenced in France, by Pilard, and Lanfranc; and soon after in England by Arden. By a succession of men of genius and learning such as Vavasseur, Mondeville, Guido de Cauliaco, Paré, Quillemeau &c. in the former, and such as Gale, Cloves, Woodall, Banister, Wiseman and others, in the latter kingdom, surgery was gradually advanced. Other authors are mentioned as Marianus Sanctus, Marcus Aurelius Severinus, Fabricius ab Aquapendente, Le Cat, Rouen, the illustrious M. De La Peyronie &c.

It was not, however, until the discovery of the circulation of the blood, and the advancement of anatomical knowledge, that surgery was placed upon a proper foundation, and assumed a steady pace. For the last century, it has been making rapid progress. But it is remarkable how long the ancient surgeons remained ignorant of the treatment of certain surgical cases. For example: Amputation was seldom, or never performed, for fear of a fatal hemorrhage. Mr. John Bell observes, that if the old surgeons ventured to amputate a limb, they only

*"Quod si illa quoque profluvio vincuntur, venae, quae sanguinem fundunt, apprehendendae, circaque id, quod ictum est, duobus locis deligandae, intercidendaeque sunt, ut et in se ipsae cocant, et nihilominus ora praeclusa habeant." Lib. V. Cap. 26.

† The tourniquet was invented by Morellus, between the years 1674 and 1680. Sharp's Crit. Inq. Petit invented another kind in 1718. The latter, with the improvements of Freke, is the one now in use.

did so, when it had mortified, by dividing the dead parts; and so great was their apprehension of bleeding, that they only dared to cut parts which could no longer bleed. And no wonder, for they knew no way of stopping the hemorrhage.

Celsus, indeed, in cases of hemorrhage from a wound, to prevent a man from bleeding to death, recommends it to be filled with dry lint, on which a sponge dipped in cold water is to be laid, and pressed on the part with the hands. If, notwithstanding, it continues to bleed, he directs repeatedly applying fresh lint dipped in vinegar. When it resists these remedies, he advises two ligatures to be applied to the wounded part of the vessel, and then to cut, or divide the portion between them.*

Notwithstanding this hint of using the ligatures, neither Celsus himself, nor his successors, seem to have taken any advantage of their use; for they all resorted to styptics, escharotics, and the actual cautery.

The tourniquet was not known in practice, till past the middle of the seventeenth century.

The double incision, in the operation of amputation was unknown till Cheselden performed it; unless it be supposed that

Cooper's Surgical Dictionary

Celsus had some idea of it when he says, "after cutting the muscles down to the bone, the flesh should be reflected, and detached underneath with a scalpel, in order to denude a portion of the bone. The latter is then to be divided as near as possible to the healthy flesh which remains adherent." The operation as performed by Cheselden, was not completely successful, for the retraction of the integuments was such, as sometimes to leave the bone bare. To remedy this Mr. Sharp proposed the cross stitch, but without effect.

Freytag was the first who attempted to extract the cataract, about the close of the seventeenth century. M. Daviel of Paris was the first who communicated the new method to the public. Many other cases might be quoted to prove, that for the principal inventions and improvements, in surgery, we are indebted to practitioners of a modern date. But these are sufficient. No one now looks into old surgical works, but to compare the ancient, with the modern state of the science.

Of the Present Improved State of Physic.

It is not without peculiar satisfaction that I mention the present improved state of physic, and recount a few, of the many discoveries and improvements which have been made in it, by which the miseries of mankind have been alleviated, the catalogue of incurables abridged, and ~~death often been baffled in his attempts upon human life.~~

It is in the United States that we see fevers yielding oftener, and in less time, than in any part of the world, to our superior treatment. It is here also, that the pathology of the yellow fever, which has depopulated tropical climates, has been ascertained, and its treatment rendered rational and successful.

By attending to its premonitory signs, and meeting them with proper prophylactics, we see pulmonary consumption prevented; and by the use of proper remedies, some forms of it cured, after its symptoms are completely developed.

"The gout has been torn from its ancient sanctuary

when death is life is not when life is death is not. Death cannot therefore attack life

Rush

in errour and prejudice"; and we now see its acute paroxysms yield to cathartics, blood-letting, a dose or two of Eau Medicinale, or vinous tincture of Colchicum Autumnale, and gentle diaphoretics.

Hydrocephalus internus, cynanche trachealis, and cholera infantum, which formerly proved so fatal to children, are now successfully treated; the two former by copious venesection, emetics and cathartics; and the last, by moderate blood-letting, mercurial purges, laudanum, mild astringents, and country air.

Acute and excruciating spasmodic pains of the head, which, under an idea of their originating in an affection of the facial nerves, were treated, per sectionem nervorum without success, now yield to the continued use of emetics.

Traumatic tetanus is now prevented, by producing an inflammation in the injured parts, and "compelling them to defend the whole system, by a local disease". And where tetanus has arisen from other causes than wounds, opium, wine, and other diffusible, and permanent stimuli, often effect a cure.

Rush's Inq.

"Death from drinking cold water, in the heated state of the body, is now obviated by previously melting the hands, or the feet, with the water to free the system from some of its superabundant caloric; and when this precaution has been neglected, the disease induced by it, is generally cured by large doses of liquid laudanum ℥ij, or other diffusible stimulants.

The improvements in midwifery are very important. In consequence of this branch being practised by well educated accoucheurs, death from parturition takes place much less frequent than formerly.

By copious blood-letting "the pains of parturition are lessened", and the birth facilitates, when from rigidity of the os tincæ, the uterus either does not contract, or contracts in vain. The same is accomplished by the use of the secale cornutum "when the contractions of the uterus are inefficient from want of energy of the uterine fibre; the cervix and os uteri, as well as the external parts, being sufficiently dilated, or disposed to dilate".

* It appears more than probable that the ergot was used by midwives, long before it came into use among accoucheurs. An old lady now living in New-Holland, Penna. which came from Germany, and was there a licensed midwife, says she knew the use of the ergot or mutter-koorn, as she calls it, more than forty years ago. And its anti-hysteric virtues are mentioned in a German work entitled "Curiosse Botanicus", published at Leipsic in 1745.

Under the article Secale, the author says "Die schwarzen Kornäpflein, oder Mutter Körnlein, lagen das Aufsteigen der mutter."

The use of the ergot till lately was unknown to accoucheurs*, and so was the present success of venaesection. †

Puerperal fever is prevented by regulating the dress, diet, and the quantity of circulating fluids; and cured by the use of the lancet, laxatives, gentle diaphoretics and fomentations.

Of the Present Improved State of Surgery.

I should greatly exceed the limits prescribed to this dissertation, were I to notice all the improvements in surgery. A part of them, however, are too important to be passed over in silence.

External aneurisms, which once proved as fatal as internal ones, are now treated with great success, by obliterating the cavity of the vessel for some distance above and below the dilatation.

Herniae which the old surgeons very imperfectly understood, are now successfully managed, since the discoveries and improvements of Camper, Gimbernat, Hey, and especially those of Mr. A. Cooper, and Mr. Lawrence, were communicated to the public.

Hemorrhage, which used to be treated by astringents and the cautery, is now stopped by compression, or ligature of the bleeding vessels.

The treatment of the injuries of the head, is much improved, since the publications of Le Dran, Pott and Abernethy have been read.

The subject of inflammation, and the healing of wounds, is now much better understood, since we have received the productions of Mr. Hunter, and Mr. Burns.

And in the United States every branch of surgery is better understood, and the practice more successful, since the publication of that most excellent treatise "The Elements of Surgery" by the late ingenious (but now lamented) Dr. J. S. Dorsey of this University.

Among the numerous American improvements the following may be enumerated.

In cases of blindness from a partial opacity of the cornea, or from the closure of the natural pupil, a new pupil is made; and where the cornea is partially opaque the opening through the iris is formed opposite to any part which retains its transpa-

*Though the use of blisters in erysipelas was known to Ambrose Paré,

ency.

The cure of fractures is now accelerated by blood-letting, and, where the union of the broken bone has not taken place from a defect of bony matter, it is produced by the inflammation caused by passing a seton between the fractured ends of the bone; instead of exposing the cavity by an incision, and cutting off the ends of the fragments, which has been suggested, and sometimes unsuccessfully performed, by European surgeons.

Luxations, which have long resisted both force and art, are now reduced in a few minutes, and without pain, by bleeding ad deliquium animi.

Chronic and indolent ulcers, are speedily cured, by destroying their surfaces, and consequently placing them in the condition of sores from recent accidents.

Erysipelas is cured, and external mortifications are checked, by the application of blisters to the affected part.*

yet the merit of bringing this remedy into use, after it had been so long antiquated, may be regarded almost tantamount to its discovery.

With regard to the application of blisters, in cases of mortifications; it ought to be observed, that it should be restricted to those, which have been preceded by inflammation. There appears to be something peculiar in the nature of inflammation having a tendency to terminate in the death of the parts affected: and it is only with a view of changing this, that blisters should be employed. Nor can they be beneficial, only in proportion as they produce this effect.

*Vid. Dorsey's Elements of Surgery Vol. I. pp. 47–50. Dr. Physick's publication in the Eclectic Repertory, for 1816.

Ischuria is cured by the addition of a piece of a bogie to a flexible catheter; and strictures in the urethra are removed by means of a caustic: also, in a more expeditious way, by dividing them with a lancet, by which the puncturing of the bladder is, in most cases (prevented) superseded.

Of late we have seen the leathern ligatures introduced into practice, in aneurismal operations, amputations, and, for the suppression of hemorrhage from accidental wounds, by which the sufferings of the patient have been abridged, and the healing of the parts facilitated.*

For the introduction of several of these remedies, and for the discovery and improvement of others, we are indebted to Dr. Physick, professor of surgery in this University. But they form only a few of the many contributions, by which he has enriched every branch of medicine.

When we take a retrospective view of our science for seventy years back, and compare it with the present improved, and improving state, how bright are our prospects in contemplating the many acquisitions which will be realized for the same period to come. Viewing it in this light, who can tell but that the present century may close, by striking off the last, from the opprobrious catalogue, of incurable diseases.

Finis.